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PP RUEHGI RUEHMA RUEHROV
DE RUEHKH #0801/01 1431205
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 231205Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7292
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHRN/USMISSION UN ROME

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000801

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SUBJECT: SOUTHERN SUDAN - DISPLACED SOUTHERN SUDANESE RETURNING HOME
ON PAR WITH 2006 LEVELS

REF: KHARTOUM 0330

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SUMMARY

(U) Thousands of Southern Sudanese displaced by conflict continue to return to their places of origin from neighboring countries and from all directions within Sudan with support from the jointly organized UN, Government of National Unity (GNU), and Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) returns program. UN officials report that organized returns in 2007 are on pace to double the number of 2006 assisted returns, although overall returns for 2007 are anticipated to be nearly the same as 2006, with approximately 500,000 people. Spontaneous returns far exceed organized returns by at least two to three fold, according to the International Organization of Migration (IOM), the agency tasked with providing transport for the organized returns. From May 1 to 6, USAID humanitarian staff visited Lakes, Warab, and Western Bahr el Ghazal states. The staff observed that the returns program varies in its effectiveness by state. The team also concluded that USAID's community-based humanitarian strategy helped lay a foundation for the new returnees to successfully reintegrate. End Summary.

OVERVIEW

1. (U) As of early May, IOM reported to the USAID team that it had assisted 26,000 displaced Sudanese to return home. IOM expects to assist between 50,000 and 55,000 additional people to return home by the end of 2007, a total of less than the original goal of 83,000 people. The shortfall is due, in part, to an initial reluctance of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to participate in the program. Now, the number of "no shows" is declining because IDPs have gained confidence in the program and the school year in Khartoum has ended. May rains have already made some county roads treacherous and will soon render many roads impassable for vehicles, limiting returns and humanitarian work.

2. (U) In Southern Sudan, IOM tracks the organized returns, and Southern Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (SSRRC) officials collect information on spontaneous returns. The spontaneous returns will only receive returns packages if they are registered with the SSRRC as returnees. However, USAID staff note

that in some instances returnees avoid official registration for fear of being "taxed." According to USAID staff, the most accurate figures for spontaneous returns come from the chiefs and administrators at the boma and payam levels.

13. (U) USAID has provided over USD 500 million in humanitarian assistance to Southern Sudan since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in January 2005, ending more than 20 years of civil war that displaced millions. USAID, the largest donor in Southern Sudan, prioritized assistance in the most severely conflict-affected areas and where the most IDPs were expected to return. Since 2005, USAID has supported more than 300 health clinics, built or rehabilitated approximately 1,000 water points, fed millions of people, and distributed seeds, tools, and relief commodities to thousands. USAID assistance, delivered through more than 30 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UN agencies, has also assisted in the sectors of local capacity building, education, peacebuilding, income generation, and nutrition.

LAKES, WARAB, AND BAHR EL GHAZAL STATES

14. (U) LAKES STATE: On May 1, USAID visited a school on the outskirts of Rumbek that served as a transit site for three days for 151 Dinka returnees to the area. A SSRRC official reported that 99 of the returnees arrived April 30 on an IOM-organized bus ride from Khartoum via Kadugli with a layover at a Wau way station. In Wau, they joined 52 refugees from Ethiopia who had just flown from Gambela. On April 30, all 151 rode from Wau to Rumbek on IOM buses where they received food and relief commodities before IOM transported them to different areas in Lakes State. The assistance package included: food rations from the UN World Food Program (WFP); seeds and tools from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); and relief commodities from the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

15. (U) WARAB STATE: A WFP official in Gogrial East County reported
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that there were 25,000 IDPs registered to return to Warab State, including 15,000 IDPs in Khartoum and 10,000 in Western Bahr el Ghazal from Warab State. As of early May, IOM has helped approximately 3,000 people return. According to WFP, there remains a one-month window for IDPs to return this year before the rains make roads impassable. In Gogrial East, SSRRC reported that IOM has completed organized returns of 719 people, including 15 from Kenya, 316 from Khartoum, and 388 from Western Bahr el Ghazal State, while 8,000 have returned spontaneously. The returns represent an increase in the overall Gogrial East population of approximately 5 percent during the first four months of 2007.

16. (U) WESTERN BAHR EL GHAZAL: According to IOM in Western Bahr el Ghazal, 600 IDPs have returned to the state in 2007 in the organized returns program and nearly 1,200 have returned spontaneously. WFP provided a three-month food ration to the organized returnees upon their arrival in Western Bahr el Ghazal, and UNICEF provided relief commodities to those departing from Khartoum. The third portion of the returns package, seeds and tools, has not yet been distributed by FAO. IDPs returning within Southern Sudan receive food and relief commodities at their final destination.

PROTECTION ISSUES

17. (U) An IOM protection officer told USAID staff that there are reports that the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and police have stopped spontaneous returnees in transit and demanded money. If the IDPs have no money, the assailants have taken luggage, shoes, mattresses, and other items. In addition, the SPLA and police occasionally force the IOM organized returns convoys to carry their friends and family, which is against IOM policy to only transport returnees. Upon return, female-headed households often find that they have lost claim to their deceased husband's shelter and land because of male lineage traditions under which the husband's family has claim to the couple's land. Men who married in IDP camps

without paying a dowry because of financial constraints and the breakdown of traditions find that their wife's family will demand the dowry to be paid upon return home.

CONCLUSIONS

18. (U) The number of spontaneous returns far exceeds organized returns, and the ability of host communities and humanitarian agencies to receive returnees varies greatly by state. Lakes State provided a returns package within 72 hours, while in Warab State it has taken humanitarian agencies weeks to distribute the returns packages. USAID partner WFP is the strongest of the three UN agencies contributing to the returns package of food, relief commodities, and seeds and tools. USAID should continue to provide targeted humanitarian assistance to the areas with the greatest numbers of returns and with the lowest levels of basic services, while working to transition to recovery and eventually development-oriented assistance.

POWERS